

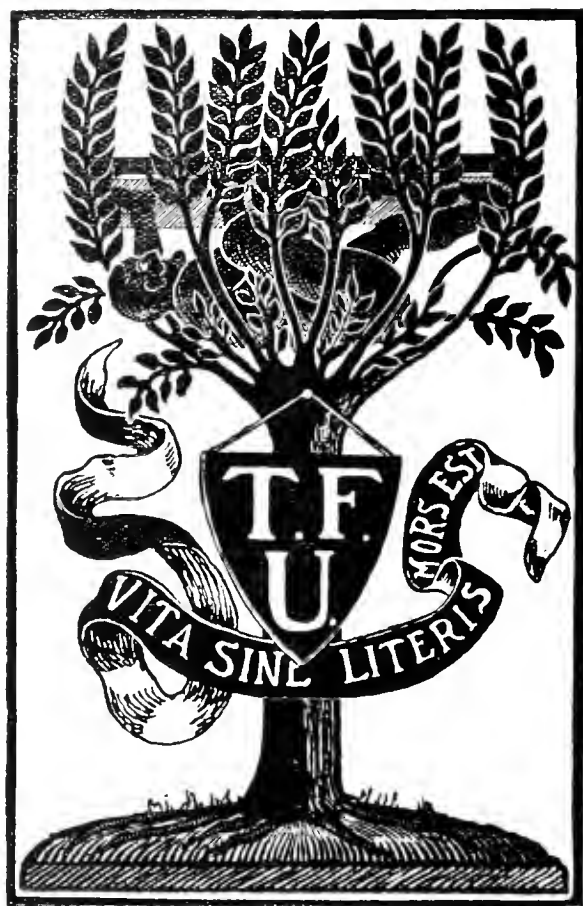
The "Halls".



Pictured by G.F.Scotson-Clark.

Published by T.FisherUnwin. LONDON.

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CHIEFLY CONCERNING THE MUSIC HALLS.

“The beat of the feet on the earth in the maddest merriest dancing ;
The glance of the eye that is glowing and bright, dancing, glancing ;
The kiss of the lips that are ruddy and warm, entrancing :

These are ours,

In the hours

When the day is done, and the sweet of the night is come.

La-la, la-la,

La-la, la-la !”

Nightshades : G. F. MONKSHOOD.

MOSTLY, a music-hall artiste is a person who is neither an artiste nor a performer in a hall of music : mostly, a music-hall artiste is a person who has less right of existence, either as fact or as name, than a pavement artiste ; mostly, a music-hall artiste is a person who has to roar, bellow, screech, caterwaul for supremacy throughout a mere orchestral free-fight. However, the music-halls, and their show-folk and merry-andrews, and their sons and daughters of song and dance, are, in some cases, not entirely devoid of merit. Then let us now consider.

Mr. Dan Leno is one of the greatest actors of our time. That a man is not an Irving or a Wyndham, is no reason for his being denied the appellation of actor. In his own particular style, Mr. Leno has but a solitary compeer—Mr. Arthur Roberts. Both are supremely alive and alert ; both are astounding mimics ; both

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are shrewd observers, and cunning reproducers of what they have seen. Mr. Roberts is, of the two, the better actor—the better man in assuming to be something other than he is himself: as they could testify who saw his clever, balanced, restrained performance of the theatre-manager in Mr. Sydney Grundy's highly interesting play, *The Silver Shield*. Mr. Leno, however, could not disguise himself though he ransacked all the workshops of Messrs. Clarkson and Nathan. And who wants him to? Certainly not the public! And he has his compensations. Mr. Leno is rather richer than Mr. Roberts, rather riper, more bland, more unctuous, less irritating, less mechanical. Beginning as a champion of one of the most diabolic forms of human expertness—clog-dancing, Mr. Leno has moved on to become a master of twenty-minute, cheerful, happily-inspired, pleasing exhibitions of ditty and monologue. He is grotesque without seeming to be hideous; he is unkempt without seeming to be pediculous. He is often farcical in the very extreme, often outrageous beyond measure; but he is always acceptable. He can make you laugh every time: you cannot resist him. He can keep you fixed in your seat till he has finished: you cannot wish to be elsewhere. His gasp of surprise at seeing you laugh, alternated with his own merriment in regard of some fictitious person's nonsense, is a thing to be up-gathered and stored against a barren day of rain and depression. Women assert that he is 'so silly'; but, at his domestic allusions and feminine personalities, they laugh as approvingly as loudly. Men assert that he is wonderfully entertaining and amusing; and they are quite right. And so long as Mr. Leno does not try to put his humour between two book-covers, but is content to exhibit the same from behind the guard of the foot-lights, for just so long will he be recognised as a

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comedian who never fails—as a comedian who is not only comic, but funny—as a comedian who not only makes caricatures, but presents characters.

Mr. Eugène Stratton is an artiste. His range is extremely limited ; but, within that range, he is extremely good. Perhaps, some of his merit consists of an ability (or a means) of persuading men to sell him good songs ; certainly, when he gets a bad one, he cannot make it acceptable. However, he rarely offends. His few faults are negative ones, and are more than balanced by his many merits. He can whistle and dance and sing ; and he can do all three quite well. He can hold an audience as can few others : perhaps, because he is always in earnest. He can make it listen to what he has to say : perhaps, because he is never too obvious. He is dexterous and fantastic ; and he has a ‘trick’ of imparting to his impersonations a savour of melancholy that is delightfully piquant. Above all, he is not only a humorist ; he is an idealist—which, in the music-halls, is as pleasing as rare.

Mr. R. G. Knowles has a style ; and a very happy, arrestive, entertaining style it is. He is intelligent ; he is cheerful ; he is vivacious—this last to a degree that is almost feminine, but which is none the less catching for that. He contrives to make partial atonement for being an Ameriean by using English jokes, and French ones. I wish he would invent more and remember less : because I, too, can read. However, I and a great many thousands of others are much indebted to him for that he can make us laugh. He keeps his face and garments comic but clean ; he uses songs that have ideas and that are not stale ; and he makes a point of omitting to be dull. For which omission, many thanks Mr. Knowles !

Mr. T. E. Dunville, to some people, is as convulsing

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as he himself is convulsive. He is Arthur Roberts galvanised; he is Edward Terry struck by lightning: he is Mr. T. E. Dunville. Vellication, however, is not humour. If he would be a trifle less epileptic, and a trifle more distinct, it is to be surmised that both himself and his audience would gain. Nevertheless, Mr. Dunville has his moments; and very good moments they are. And though, at times, he steppeth a-near the perilous edge of things tabooed, no one is any the worse for that; and he is mostly able to provoke mirth—from somebody or other.

Mr. G. H. Chirgwin, twenty or more years ago, was struck by an idea; he struck it back. The upshot of the quarrel was "The White-eyed Kaffir." No doubt, it is partly the fault of his public that he has never since thought of much else. At all events, his popularity is unabated; and, though now and then he avails himself of the privileges of an old favourite, he continues to be as industrious as ever. He is an able musician, and a deft trickster with 'properties.' He can play his violin like the proverbial angel, and can extract humour from articles so unpromising as clay pipes. His audience greet him with uproarious welcome, and bid him farewell with uproarious regret. And if his audience be pleased, who else may grumble?

The Brothers Griffiths, if they would acquire a little new 'patter,' would continue to be amusing. About twelve years ago, I heard them tell their audience that they themselves were "mackerelbats," and ask of each other "Which is me?"; about twelve days ago, I heard them do precisely the same thing. In the interim, however, I have met them on the Continent and in various parts of the British Isles; and, every time, I have willingly joined in the laughter and applause with which their performances are so deservedly greeted.

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Although, now, they mostly 'fake,' they are able acrobats and clever clowns. And they are genuine humorists. Their "Blondin Donkey" is one of the most hilarious things ever presented to the public; their lion-taming episode, though not quite so popular, is equally as good: both are unique, funny, care-dispersing. When, for example, the lion is a trifle early in taking up his cue to roar, and the trainer admonishes him with: "Too soon! you silly lion!"—well, then the listeners feel that, for a time, they sit in a kingdom where the only weeping is caused by laughter.

Miss Vesta Tilley is clever, bright, refined. She is the one woman that has ever reconciled me (even momentarily) to seeing a 'male impersonator.' God forbid that I should ever again see a 'female impersonator'! Miss Tilley is very popular; and not without reason. She can be amusing, volatile, adroit, and a presenter of character—all in one song; and while she is on the stage, her audience is never bored.

Miss Bessie Wentworth—dainty and fair—always presents a pleasing picture, and has the gift of making a 'coon-song' nearly tolerable.

Miss Marie Loftus—blithe and powerful—can dance and mimic right merrily, and has the gift of perpetual *still*-youngeess.

Mr. Harry Randall has a happy 'knack' of finding popular songs—songs with popular catch-words. And because, in addition, he is rather comic, rather amusing, and very distinct—he has won much favour and money.

Mr. George Robey has encasked the quintessence of imbecility. Sometimes he decants his vintage, and from the proceeds makes much fun; sometimes he does not. He is billed as "The Prime-minister of Mirth"; but, as * * * also was called a prime-minister—well, the appellation is scarcely a complete compliment. Never-

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theless, Mr. Robey is nearly always funny. Now and again, he is guilty of committing somewhat Noachian japes and conceits; but, on the whole, he is quite original and almost new. And there is no denying that he can make his audience laugh.

Miss Marguerite Corneille is an accomplished musician; also she is a captivating singer; and she is as good to look upon as she is to listen to. If there were many more such artistes so placed, the music-hall would be as highly esteemed as the concert-hall now is, and would have the advantage of possessing some of the latter's desirable refinement without any of its repellent dulness.

Miss Vesta Victoria, whatever may be urged against her occasional lack of decorum, has certainly never given her audience an opportunity to complain of her lack of sprightliness. She is vivacity itself. Her power of enlivening is great. She is provocative, but amusing. Although she may not always please, she will rarely offend. She may sometimes disturb; but she will never bore. And if, after listening to one of Miss Victoria's not too subtle ditties, you still are of opinion that a young lady should sing nothing but hymns—well, there are the Salvation Army lasses to hand.

Mr. G. H. Macdermott began before I arrived; he will probably be hard at work long after I am gone. It is understood that he supplied much entertainment to our fathers; it is possible that he will perform a like kind office for our sons: thus he may more than compensate for having failed so signally with an intervening generation. Twenty and more years ago—to be exact, in 1877—when Admiral Hornby took an English fleet, with decks cleared for action, through the Dardanelles, Mr. Macdermott used, under peculiar conditions, a popular oath that has since been twisted into phrasing

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a state of mind from which no person of intelligence has ever suffered. 'Jingoism' once meant a non-desire to fight, coupled with a fitness and an ability to do so. 'Jingoism' now means war at any price, and that only; yet we find the term being used against men who are so foolish as to think that Nelson and Wellington were saviours of their country—being used against men who are so misguided as to believe that our navy is the power by which we lay us down to sleep in peace. If 'Jingoism' be used to denote a desire for martial efficiency—well, I can only say that the term should not be taken as one of reproach. However, that this word, 'Jingoism,' came to be coined from a song put into currency by Mr. Macdermott, was not his fault; it was his fortune. That his thrift has scarcely equalled his industry is—his own business. And that there are people who wish him well, for old sake's sake, is—their business. To this may be added that, in the matter of 'lion comiques,' the old are no worse than the new; and that age is no more of a crime than is youth; and that Mr. Maedermott takes rank as one of the greatest representatives of a type.

Miss Harriet Vernon is not great; she is 'immense.' Though she rarely fills the bill, she always fills the stage. Not that Miss Vernon depends upon her appearance. She knows her business; and of that business she is a mistress. When her authors omit to fail her, she omits to fail her authors. On those occasions, the public responds with loud-voiced strong-handed applause.

Mr. Herbert Campbell is well known.

Mr. Alec Hurley I have not seen; but I am told that he is good.

Miss Marie Lloyd I *have* seen; and I am told that *she* is good.

Mr. Harry Bedford may one day have a following as numerous as that of the Pied Piper of Hamelin—in

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which last connection I refer, no doubt, solely to the children. Let us hope that Mr. Bedford's following, when engaged in following, will be taken by their preceder (as was promised Robert Browning's poetic-born little ones) to "a land where it is always afternoon."

Mr. Paul Cinquevalli is an absolute master of his business. And his title of *The Incomparable* is not only enjoyed; it is deserved.

Mr. Paul Martinetti is the finest pantomimist of our day. His work at its best rises above mere agility. He is magnetic and versatile. Without help of writing, assisted only by music, he can move his audience to volleys of laughter and floods of tears.

Miss Ada Reeve is an artiste from her forehead to her feet. She is clever almost beyond compare; she is fragile and dainty; she is fine and delicate. Her singing is pleasant: it is so distinct and well-managed. Her dancing is delightful: it is so unforced and floating. As to her gestures, she can talk with them. Than Miss Reeve, there is no woman on the music-hall stage who possesses a greater range from grave to gay, no woman who is a completer mistress of impersonating those moods. And if, in finesse, she has her superior, I do not know that superior. She can be suggestive without being offensive. Also, she can be pathetic without being funny, funny without being pathetic. Her chief demerit is weakness; but if she were as strong as she is charming—well, as an Irishman might say, she would not be so charming. That I never derive artistic pleasure from a steam-roller, and that I always prefer quality to quantity, are two reasons why I refrain from adjourning to the bar when appears a number that announces Miss Reeve.

Mr. Gus Elen is an example of the value (to the doer) of imitation. But he has not copied in quite a right manner. Unlike his prototype, he too much re-

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sembles the real thing (the real thing that he portrays) to be wholly pleasing. To measure the little by the great, he is the Zola of costermongers, as his forerunner was the Dickens. However, he has shown some skill in selecting songs that suit him, and that have catch-words; and the public have whistled them, and repeated them, and applauded them. Wherefore, it is to be surmised that Mr. Elen is not without some favour-bringing qualities; and certainly he has won opinions that are golden.

Mr. Albert Chevalier draws; he does not photograph. Mr. Albert Chevalier has ideas, not reflections: He is an experimentalist and an inventor. He has written verses that even so clever a man as Mr. Barry Pain must have found useful to read before setting out to write under the name of Tompkins. He is a trained musician: which is why his own melodies are always quite original. He can make use of the minor with an effect that is often as pleasing as surprising; he is as clever an executant as he is a composer; and he does not depend upon waltz refrains. His chief artistic merit is this: he is a master of his materials, and he never attempts to control what he does not possess. He has little dignity and less repose; yet he rarely irritates his audience, and never makes himself ridiculous. His range histrionic, over both intellect and emotion, is very extensive: he can be witty and sentimental, humorous and pathetic; and he can be all four with conviction. He has no 'weight'; but he does not lack 'grip'. He has no power; but he does not lack persuasion. The things that he says and does seem always right and real: because he omits to be heavy or violent, and because he can suggest with digital by-play and facial movement what he would not succeed in conveying with voice or stature. His ability to exhibit character, though rather limited, is quite superlative.

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He can not only move and speak like the people he portrays; he can think like them. And he can not only engage the attention of an audience; he can satisfy it. His success in the music-halls is to be attributed partly to the fact that he was a success in the theatres—in a word, he is an actor. He does not give one the impression (as do so many of his fellow-workers) that he could sell vegetables quite as well as he can sing songs, that he could dispose of bad beef by mock-auction quite as well as he can maintain a flow of ‘character-patter.’ No—he has the power of disguising himself. Those that saw his performances at the old Court Theatre, and at the Royalty, Strand, Avenue—saw good things. I wonder how many of his actor friends who, in those days, used to smile at his partiality for ‘nose-paste’ in his make-ups, and who, above all, used to rock with laughter at his coster stories and ditties—I wonder how many foresaw his successful climb to fame and fortune. Certainly he himself did not; or, if he did, he concealed his visionary knowledge. I have not met Mr. Chevalier the man and storyteller, for several years, and it is highly probable that he has long forgotten my very existence; but Mr. Chevalier the artist and artiste,* is still a friend of mine. During his career in the music-halls, he achieved the greatest success possible. He had magazine articles written round him. I do not remember that he was ever pictured as seated in his ‘study.’ I sincerely hope not. But I do remember that whatever success he won to, it was worked for and deserved. In a world where popularity and merit are so often kept apart, it is quite pleasing to find them once in a while brought together. Although, of late, Mr. Chevalier does not seem to have caught the public ear so completely as of yore, he has only to address

* *An artist creates; an artiste performs.*

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himself from his new quarters with a certain amount of persistence, to gain a position even better than was his old one. He stood highest among the few that made the music-hall a thing to be taken seriously. He will yet win to the pride of place long held by the ever-to-be-lamented Corney Grain. And I, for one, shall rejoice. For Mr. Chevalier is a man of fine talents finely applied.

In addition to most of the ladies and gentlemen whose pictures are in this book, and some of the several others whose pictures are not but ought to be, many things may be seen in the music-halls quite worthy of commendation. The jugglers, and the acrobats, and even the trick bicyclists, are mostly pleasing—if only because they do not talk. Apart from their silence, one must admire the dexterity, the grace, the ease, with which they accomplish their astounding feats. Of course, in regard to some of them, there occurs to the memory that ease of a woman preaching that reminded Samuel Johnson of a dog standing upon its hind legs, and that caused him to say it was not to be expected the thing should be done well—it was merely surprising the thing should be done at all; and, in regard to most performing animals, one immediately thinks of that young lady who played a piece of music so difficult as to make “Blinking Sam” wish it had been impossible. But conjure up the sustained application, the never-ceasing practice—conjure up the years of labour and patience necessary to do these things even badly; then think of the hours of self-restraint, the hours of hope deferred—think of the strength of wrist, the sureness of eye, that go to making these tricks a complete success! Although certain of us strongly object to seeing people court their death upon a high wire, or encompass the murder of their self-respect by disrobing upon a trapeze, we are all at agreeance in believing that

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the average juggler and the average acrobat not only takes his salary, but earns it.

Occasionally, one has the pleasing fortune to meet in the programme with such names as Miss Lucy Clarke and Mr. Curtis Dalton, and with those of other singers of fine ballads and good songs. Would there were more such artistes in the music-halls! Not that I myself have the slightest objection to witnessing, for example, the energetic displays of agility and mock-malevolence given by fighting tumblers of the order of the late Two Maes, or of the present McNaughtons—especially if their ‘patter’ is as delightfully uncouth and amusingly silly as that of the first-named was and the last-named is. And as for true pantomime—stories without speech, wit without words—where shall one discover more brilliant exhibitions of fun and frolic, dexterity and device, than those given by such masters of their business as Mr. Charles Lauri and his clever companions?

Mr. John Hollingshead has written (in *Plain English*) that the word music-hall is a “term of reproach applied to the chosen nursery of the British Drama”; and he has written further that the Lord Chamberlain is a “functionary in England who regulates court millinery and dramatic literature”; and he has written further still that “it is absurd that the Examiner of Plays is empowered to strike out passages in dramatic works represented at a hundred theatres, which passages can be read or acted at ten thousand music-halls, delivered from twenty thousand public platforms, and circulated in a million books, pamphlets, and newspapers.” Certainly, the music-hall enjoys a surprising (if fortunate) immunity from the meddlesome finger of the Censor; and we might, so far as stands the law, have had the wonder and pleasure of seeing Madame Sarah Bernhardt performing *Salomé* at the Oxford, or a collection of English talent disporting

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with Ibsen's *Ghosts* at the Tivoli—providing the duration of each performance were not more than forty minutes. If the plays were acted in dumb-show, the performance could last all the evening. O just, subtle, and mighty Law!

One of the worst charges that can be brought to bear correctly against the music hall is this: the music-hall is too much of an educative factor. In short, to paraphrase Mr. Hollingshead, the music-hall is the chosen school-room of the British Brain. How far this is the fault of the British Brain, and how far the fault of the music-hall, I will endeavour to decide later on. Sufficient for the paragraph is the evil thereof! From the music-hall come the melodies that fill the public mind; from the music-hall come the catch-words that fill the public mouth. But for the fecundity of the music-hall, how barren would be the land, how void the chit-chat of the drawing-rooms, the parlours, the sculleries! In what way, other than by apeing the latest contortion, could 'Arry make 'Arriet guffaw? In what way, other than by parrotising the latest witticism, could Edwin make Angelina giggle? And in what way, other than by ambling through the latest skirt-dance, could Gwendolen captivate the soul of Algernon? How would the bean-feasters conceal their sadness, if there were no comic songs? How would the Bank-holiday makers conceal their boredom, if there were no waltz-refrains? And how would the urban and suburban classes and masses beguile the tedium of slow hours, and find an excuse for pausing in their 'life-work,' if there were no barrel-organs to brinkerty-brankerty, crinkerty-crankerty, drinkerty-drinkerty—and so on through a whole horridous alphabet of machine-made discord? For, although some of us detest these hell-wrought instruments of torture, others there are who adore them; and, although some of

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us consider that every person who to their manipulators gives money should be hurled headlong into a mortar-making mill, and indiscriminately ground to death by mad organ-grinders, others there are who fondly believe (what time they act upon their belief) that the dear hard-working Sons of Saffron Hill should be not only greeted with smiles of grateful approval, but given the means whereby to feed their faces with fatted-fowl. However, the music-hall is not entirely an unmixed curse. It assuredly has too great an influence upon the British Brain; but, after all, it serves to take the masses (and certain of the classes) temporarily out of themselves: which must be a blessing—to them.

Some there are who noisily assert that the music-hall induces the public to annihilate its health, murder its time, squander its money: this last, it is broadly hinted, being mostly the property of its employers. Of course, the said public might be somewhat better engaged—might be occupied in planning out great schemes for the amelioration of mankind, or in blowing bubble companies to keep the aristocracy in pocket-money, or in compiling magazine articles and ponderous tomes concerning *The Methods Of Making My Neighbour A Better Man Than Myself*.

I have no intention whatever of reproaching the music-hall from an ethical standpoint. This absurdity I prefer to leave to those compounds of actor and bully that so well contrive to play their dual-parts in our pulpits, that so well contrive to induce to sit at their feet an admiring multitude of good ladies—good ladies with big hearts and little brains—good ladies who appear to be desirous not so much of wanting to cure immorality as of wanting to learn all about it. Also, I prefer that, instead of me, the President of the Woman's Well-wisher Society should air her views on the subject, and her person on the platform: she would be more amusing than I—and quite as useless. Besides,

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far be it from me to suggest that the music-hall programmes should be prepared for the use of Families and Young Persons. I would not have it thought that I aspire to sit on the right hand of the late Mr. Thomas Bowdler: whose "peculiar happiness" it was that he had so purged Shakespeare and Gibbon that they could no longer "raise a blush on the cheek of modest innocence, nor plant a pang in the heart of the devout Christian." No—I should not like to add my name to our language as a synonym for senseless expurgation. And I have no wish even to *attempt* to climb to the heights of Bleat that are scaled so easily by certain wondrous men who, while they deceive themselves—honestly but completely—into thinking that they are raising aloft the Banner of the Ideal, merely denounce artistry as an abomination, entertainment as an enormity, beauty as a beast.

That brilliant and lovable genius, Robert Louis Stevenson, has set down some arrestive words of wisdom that, though written in 1888, still stand good. "A strange temptation attends upon man: to keep his eye on pleasures even when he will not share in them; to aim all his morals against them. This very year, a lady (singular iconoclast!) proclaimed a crusade against dolls; and the racy sermon against lust is still a feature of the age. I venture to call such moralists insincere. At any excess or perversion of a natural appetite, their lyre sounds of itself with relishing denunciations; but for all displays of the truly diabolic—envy, malice, the mean lie, the mean silence, the calumnious truth, the back-biter, the petty tyrant, the peevish poisoner of family life—their standard is quite different. These are wrong, they will admit, yet somehow not so wrong; there is no zeal in their assault on them, no secret element of gusto warms up the sermon; it is for things not wrong in themselves that

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they reserve the choicest of their indignation.
If your morals make you dreary, depend upon it they are wrong. I do not say 'give them up,' for they may be all you have; but conceal them like a vice, lest they should spoil the lives of better and simpler people."

To the foregoing, I add that there is just as much immorality in the music-hall as men and women choose to take there—and no more. The mental morass into which so many of our professional moralists flounder and sink is that of mistaking offences against art for offences against religion. Believe me, my dear stipendiary gospel-gossips, my dear salaried salesmen of lip-devotion—yes, and even my dear paid but *honest* vendors of virtue and faith—believe me, that vulgarity and stupidity and incompetence are in no wise to be confounded with immorality. But there! What else than such a blunder (or falsity, or self-swindle) is to be expected from people that are paid to be good! Paid to be good! Come now, that, in its own way, must be as deforming as being paid to be bad.

Take the music-hall as an affair of artistry. In that, time after time, the music-hall fails—fails lamentably as completely. Rare it is that a rose is inermous; but that is scarcely a reason why we should be forced, when seated in a music-hall, to wear a whole crown of thorns. Rather, bedeck us, O Artistes, with the paper-wreath of flowers and 'property' crook of the stage shepherdess! Instead, too often, Watteau is wronged into "Wot ho!"; Dresden is degraded into the Isle of Dogs; and the canvas trees and lime-lit dells are made to shiver and resound with a wild welter of instrumental noise and raucous bellowings.

Perhaps, the greatest sinners are the men. The majority of them are not artistes at all; they are not even artisans: for, although their favourite would-be flouts and jeers are

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directed at the British workman, they themselves are the worst craftsmen that ever followed a calling. And failure as a music-hall artiste—of *their* kind—is failure indeed : one might as soon expect a hod-carrier to fail. Too often, these men are mere professional uglies, mere practitioners of the hideous ; too often, they are beautiful as gargoyles and graceful as bears, without being either quaint or amusing. Some are not content to transform themselves into things of absurdity and laughter ; they must need become things of horror and loathing. Some are not content to array themselves in appropriate garments flecked with colour, and provocative of mirth ; they must need bespread upon their persons unnecessary rags maculated with mud, and suggestive of parasites. A few go even so far as to make capital out of their personal deformities. Of course, we know that writers—a Dante, a Heine, a Dickens, a Lamb—occasionally make capital out of their personal *emotions* ; and, equally of course, we know that musicians and painters—a Beethoven, a Chopin ; a Blake, a Romney—sometimes do likewise. But the result is rather different ; and mostly tends to good, or at least to art. However, it is better, of course, that these freaks (I beg pardon !) these abnormals should be collected under the roofs of music-halls and given each the salary of a secretary of state, rather than that they should be spread about the streets and set to selling matches or to working usefully. If the latter were so, we should always be meeting them ; as it is, they can be avoided. And to declaim against them is to break a beetle on a wheel.

Rather, let our tears of blood be reserved for the ladies. Concerning that little matter of abnormality, I, for one, am in no wise overjoyed upon seeing a woman bring her occipital into close contact with her glutæus. Of course, if the public likes that sort of thing—well,

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that is the sort of thing the public likes. Therefore, although I omit to praise, I do not offer to blame—the performer. But with regard to *certain* of the bodily contortions that I once had the ill-luck to witness, I must declare that I yearned for a sialogogue: this that I might have expressed my opinion the more copiously. And should you remind me that I am using anatomical and medical words, I shall remind you that I am dealing with anatomical and medical things. It may be that I am over-finical and hyper-fastidious, it may be that I am not long for this world, it may be that some time since I ought to have departed for another; but while I am here, I shall continue to confess that I see neither charm nor merit even in a young lady doing the ‘splits.’ To me, the action is what Rudyard Kipling’s navvy became on a certain occasion—“purely disgusting.” It is not only unseemly, it is ungraceful; it is not only unlovely, it is unnecessary. However, turn we to the ladies that stand upon their feet. Some sing like dancers; others dance like singers. Most ‘get through’ their business in a manner precisely opposed to that that they should. Of course, many are not expected to do much; but when these so completely fulfil expectation, I am none the less disappointed. Some are all leg and no larynx, all figure and no form, all manner and no matter. And what a *bad* manner! Often they sing with their limbs. M. Zola’s Nana, when, once upon a time, she broke down in a song, cunningly wriggled her hips, to distract attention from her incompetence. Some of our music-hall ladies do nothing else.

Man has compelled woman to conceal her legs; she has retaliated by exposing her breasts. Concerning the stalls of a theatre, and some other places, this is a whole truth; concerning the stage of a music-hall, and, for that matter, the stage of certain theatres, this is a half

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truth. There she gives a display that is not only pectoral; it is pedalian, patellie, pelvic: a display that includes almost everything. Please record that I am not reproaching her for this. If the limbs are not too obviously over-padded, and the costumes not too obviously over-coloured—well, who am I that I should quarrel with a masterpiece? For Woman *is* a masterpiece. Confucius has said so; and as, to my knowledge, he did not add in what *way* she is a masterpiece, I have never doubted him. Of course, a congenital stupid may evolve from the slowly-churning matter of his brain a debateable belief that a woman in ‘tights’ is suggestive of a butterfly that has flown a yard or so too near the sun and gotten its wings burnt off. But you may think otherwise. And, as for me, what I am concerned about chiefly is that she shall be capable, not incompetent; that she shall sing and dance, not screech and dally. Let her be an artiste, and (as with Dumas heroine that loved much) much shall be forgiven her. Indeed, did she but fulfil the condition that I here set down, there would be nothing to forgive; there would be only something to praise. And whenever I meet with that something, the praise is given ungrudgingly and extensively.

So much for the manner; now for the matter. This concerns both performers feminine and performers masculine. The corybantic comedians who assume to be the high-priests of wit and humour, and the vellicating vestals who pretend to keep alight the sacred lamp of frivolity and fun—are equally to blame in regard of the stuff they elect to shout and deliver, are equally to blame in supposing that perspiration is art and that noise is craftsmanship. To keep to the matter—and to leave the manner for good—their songs and monologues are bad. They are not vicious; but

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they *are* vulgar. They are not indecent; but they *are* indelicate. And this brings us to an additional cause for complaint. Vulgarity may be alert and amusing, indelicaey may be adroit and alluring; but, too often, these ditties and ‘wheezes’ are none of those things. And, mostly, they are not even vulgar and indelicate; they are merely dull and silly.

However, once upon a time, I heard a certain hysterical cockney—who was drawing as salary (in fact, not in fancy; in negotiable cheques, not in newspaper paragraphs) a sum of money that, differently applied, might have done much good in the world—well, I heard this said hysterical cockney ejaculate during his performance a certain remark (about a possession peculiar to fish) that should properly have won him a sound ‘booting’ from every man in the audience. What occurred was that some of the men laughed, and most of the women, having first dutifully tittered, looked to the men for explanation. It is to be hoped that that was not given them. Witticisms of this kind are of such stuff as dirt is made of, and their little life is rounded with a groan—or should be, in public. Nevertheless, I repeat that, usually, the songs and ‘patter’ native to the music-halls are merely dull and silly.

Stupid gaiety not only bores; it saddens. Sometimes, when seated in a “Home of Melody and Mirth,” I could emulate the Wahrus and Carpenter—I could “weep like anything.” Says somebody, somewhere, somehow, “Talk not to me of grief till thou hast seen the tears of warlike men.” Talk not to *me* of *anguish* till thou hast endured certain performances at certain music-halls. I say *certain* advisedly. For, at others, I have seen some truly admirable performances—which is why I (and a vast multitude) have visited music-halls more times than one; which is why so many of us so often permit our

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hopes to triumph over our memories; which is why so many of us so often sit out a whole programme-full of the bad in trust that we may at the last meet with one thing that shall be good.

Whence do music-hall artistes emanate? Personally, I do not care. So that they be but artistes—true artistes—they may come, for all I wish, from the court, the camp, the grove, the vessel, or the mart; they may get themselves born in the gutter or on the kerbstone; they may arrange for their names to be entered on Life's Book from the mansion or from the palace. As a matter of truth, music-hall artistes, in general, arrive from *all* stations of existence; but, mostly, from somewhere a long way *down* the line. To those, good luck!

The following letter (which was once shown me), even if it does not interest, may at least amuse:—

DEAR SIR,

Reading of your Advertisement In the Entrance that you Learn step danceing i want you to Oblige me by letting me know how much you Charge for Each lesson i have got a Notion of danceing and please let me know when you Give your lesson and hurry Up has this could be very important For you.

i remain

Yours truely,

J—— D——,

Drew's Buildings juniper St.
King david Lane Shadwell.

I do not say that this brief, bright, brotherly person ever won to a hundred pounds a week. But——

Few people set out in life with a dominant idea of entering the music-halls professionally; they that reach there, mostly drift there—which remark applies equally to the average actor. Parenthetically, when is some good-hearted but disinterested Samaritan going to write a book on *How To Get Off The Stage?* Numbers of men and women that have burnt their wings in the footlights would be glad to take their scorched and disappointed

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persons elsewhither. Nevertheless, one still meets with the following kind of thing. Fancy the man who was capable of all that is there set forth—fancy him wanting to be but a mere actor!

SIR,

I beg to say that I am in quest of a situation as assistant stage-manager, designer, assistant scene-painter, elocutionist, and instructor of stage-grouping. Would be pleased to turn myself useful in the fencing department and at making-up from any period. I am a first-class figure-drawer, ancient and modern. I speak French, Spanish, Russian, Moorish, and American. I have travelled about Europe, and Heligoland, and Morocco, and New York. I am a good rider, good sailor, good polo-player. Can sing in five languages, and dance in any style you like to mention. Can play the piano, and throw the hammer. Am well educated in history of armorial bearings, costumes, shields, devices and public-house signs. Composer of verse of every description. Sketcher of all kinds of things. Age 31—height 5 ft. 8 in.—complexion very fair. Doctors tell me that although my teeth are brittle they will last for some time. The tip of my right ear is missing, and I have an ugly scar on the left breast. But I don't think it ought to stand in my way. I should be glad to give my services to any company in London or on tour. Of course, I should prefer a salary. But that need only be small—at first.

Trusting an answer, and thanking you heartily in anticipation of same, I am, sir,

Yours faithfully,

FERDINAND ST. J——.

(Late Valet D—— Club).

The reply this Admirable Crichton received I am not at liberty to disclose. But, although this Master of All the Arts appears to have done, and to be ready to do, and to intend doing, every possible thing in this worst of all possible worlds, I have not, so far, met him as an actor. And yet the good fellow stood an excellent chance of success, if only because of his vast possession of a complete lack of self-humour. Nevertheless, I have been told that it is possible to meet with many men of this all-round type (and women too, for that matter) wandering aimlessly about on the stage, disguised as 'professionals': good swimmers,

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good shots, good lookers, good liars ; anything but good actors. Now and again, these gentlemen, having carried themselves on the boards, for some years, take to carrying the boards on themselves, for some purpose : in brief, they advertise the performances of future sandwichmen.

And so, by uneasy stages, I arrive at "Poverty Corner." But I do not intend to remain there. "Abler pens than mine" have described that well-known junction of roads, with its Monday-morning gathering of the halt, the poor, the mean, and the aggressively ugly. As for my own impressions, they are duly set down in another place. However, I may state here that, although I am not in the habit of viewing the Waterloo Road through "a mist of tears"—as certain of our lady novelists would say—I yet do not look upon it through a wreath of smiles. Around and about "Poverty Corner" there is much matter for laughter ; but there is little matter for mirth.

Mr. George Moore has written words to the effect that an actor is a person who repeats what another person has invented. This is quite true, so far as it goes. But it does not allow for the additional truth that an actor may repeat an author's invention exceedingly well : and thus, after all, may be possessed of great merit. Of course, unfortunately, an actor can repeat an author's invention very badly ; equally of course, and equally unfortunately, an author can *invent* very badly. That is precisely what so many of the writers for the music-halls persistently do.

What are their subjects ? I have no desire to answer. Not being absolutely facinorous, I will spare you—spare you both the truth and an exaggeration. As for a burlesque of most of these amazing works, none but themselves can be their parody.

What is their language ? Cliché for their sentiment,

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slang for their humour. Abstention from giving samples of such things, does not imply a plenitude of kindness ; it only exhibits a lack of cruelty.

However, please read a sentence that has been written about the subject in hand by Professor Walter Raleigh in his brilliant book on *Style*. Speaking of slang, bad slang, and the low taste of a certain section of the public, he says:—"The pottle-headed lout who in a moment of exuberance strikes on a new sordid metaphor for any incident in the beaten round of drunkenness, lubricity, and debt, can set his fancy rolling through the music-halls, and thence into the streets, secure of applause and a numerous sodden discipleship." Now, this is severe: not only because it *is* severe, but because it is true.

Clever things may be said about drunkenness, lubricity, and debt—by clever people. But these people are not clever ; they are not even smart. Here and there one may meet with a writer for the music-halls who is 'tricky' ; and that is the best that can be said : there are *degrees* of intelligence even among oysters—at least, so we may surmise. Mostly, however, these hop-leaved versifiers of the Strand, these up-to-date disciples of Aristophanes and Anacreon, are stupid—immeasurably and incommunicably stupid. They lounge always along the line of least resistance ; and so—unhasting but unrelenting—they contrive to shamble forward, forward, forward to beyond the ultimate outposts of inanity.

Lest it should be imagined that the present critic is a man who has failed in creating that which he can merely criticise, he sets out hot-hand to write down the truth : he has never tried ; he could not succeed ; and, if he could, it would be of no value—to him.

This conveys me to one of the reasons for the superlative badness of these compositions. They are of small worth—either in the bringing of fame, or in the bringing

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of fortune—to their producers. It is only their repeaters who acquire the ‘kudos’; it is only their repeaters who acquire the ‘shekels.’ No one thinks for a moment of the man who *wrote* the song. That Mr. Bullmouth or Miss Brassthorat “adequately rendered” the same, is more than sufficient for the amusement-seeking audience. After all, why should sorrow seize *them*, why should *their* hearts bleed to the white, because the inventor received but a miserable sum for an article that the high-salaried shouter is at liberty to go on repeating three and four times a night for over twelve months?

It may be urged that these compositions are not worth more than is paid for them. Granted—if their intrinsic value be considered; *not* granted—if their accidental value be considered. Andrew Fletcher, of Salton, knew a wise fellow who believed that, if a man were permitted to make all the ballads of a nation, he need not care who should make the laws. And I know another wise fellow who is of opinion that—if the men that make the laws (however queerly) would arrange for the men that make the ballads (however poorly) to have a proper, a greater, share of the income derived (by others) from the outcome of their brains—the world would be rid of a certain amount of wrong.

Dumas the elder, to make a play, wanted four boards, two actors, and a passion. Some other people, to make a ‘sketch,’ want four boards, two impostors, and a vulgarity. At times, one chances upon a piece of work from their hands that is not wholly bad; mostly, however, one finds a mere forcible-feeble mixture of melodrama and maudlinity. And, no doubt, things in this quarter remain as they are, owing to the fact that writing for the music-halls is the one province of Art that, so far, has not been entered by women: perhaps, because they wish to prove Pope’s statement in regard of fools and angels.

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Concerning the music! Mostly, it is mere noise: blatant, blaring, barbarous; strident, streperous, shocking. If you tell me that this is usually the fault of the executants, I must say that the composers are equally to blame. Several of the latter appear to have been born and bred in a brass-foundry: which remark applies even more strongly to the 'arrangers': *their* work, too often, is a case of directing other people to crash and smash, and blare away at random. Amid such insurrections of noise, for something soft and soothing, a man shall wait in vain. Rarely does one meet with a movement that is graceful and cultured; rarely does one meet with a melody that is fantastic and riant. And as for sweetness, it is unknown—to the composers for the music-halls. That these minor weavers of sound are not Wagners nor Beethovens, need scarcely preclude them from being, say, second-rate Wallaces or Balfes—or even a Mr. Leslie Stuart: who, if at times a trifle commonplace and obvious, is always completely fluent and melodious. They might take a leaf from the score of Mr. Walter Slaughter: an admirable workman who has not forgotten that there are quite several instruments rather more important than the drum and the cymbal; and who has proved that, in music, it is possible to be popular yet pretty, popular yet tuneful, popular yet original. There is no thief like a musical thief. But why do these particular devotees of Euterpe so often steal from each other? Why do these interbreeding compilers for music-halls so often merely reproduce each others' banalities? Why do they not take horse for the British Museum? Why do they not examine those forty operas of which Handel was the composer? If they did *that*, they might possibly repeat something original. In any case, they might possibly, for a while, from the waltz refrain.

Whose fault is it that the artistical bad runs rampant?

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Whose fault is it that the artistical bad is greeted with tumult of acclaim? In brief, who is to be condemned? "That brute of a public, that ass of a public, that detestable, stupid, degraded pig of a public!"—as Charles Mackay once called it.

Since such is so, small wonder that the artistic battle is often to the weak—small wonder that the artistic race is often to the slow—small wonder that success (in the music-halls and elsewhere) is often achieved by sheer incompetence! I had thought of *paraphrasing* the following epigraph to the nineteenth chapter of *The Naulahka*; on second thought, I prefer to present it unmutilated: change but a few of the words, alter the local colour, and the tale is told of ourselves. Listen! It is the makers (let us suppose) of our national ballads, the makers of our songs for the people. They speak:

“We be the gods of the East—
Older than all—
Masters of mourning and feast,
How shall we fall?
“Will they gape to the husks that ye proffer,
Or yearn to your song?
And we, have we nothing to offer,
Who ruled them so long
In the fume of the incense, the clash of the cymbal, the blare
of the conch and the gong?
“Over the strife of the schools
Low the day burns—
Back, with the kine from the pools,
Each one returns
To the life that he knows where the altar-flame glows
and the *tulsi* is trimmed in the urns.”

Mr. George Moore, in his haste, has written that “the public is a filthy cur,” and that “it is the duty of every artist to kick it in the ribs on passing.” This is as forcible as incorrect. The public is merely indiscriminative. At any rate, I trust that it was not because the public was

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filthy that it bought some twenty thousand copies of that unpardonably dull book *Evelyn Innes*; what time, for example, it was comparatively neglecting so praiseworthy a piece of work as *Modern Painting*; the most brilliant thing *of its kind* ever produced. No—the public is not filthy; it is merely indiscriminative: it cannot tell the good from the bad. Concerning matters artistic, the brain of the public works in a manner that is chiefly feminine. The public likes a thing, or it does not like a thing; and if one asks the public Why?—lo, it answers Because I do, or Because I do not! To sum up, the dear public is in the womanly position of knowing precisely what it likes, and of being utterly unable to render a reason.

Nevertheless, the dear public can render an opinion; and it can do so (at the theatre, for instance) very vehemently, very disgracefully, very unnecessarily. There, time and again, it forgets that an opinion, and a quite adverse opinion, can be loudly expressed by silence. Why become uproarious, when an unbroken quiet can chill the very marrow of the most conceited actor, or author, that ever puffed his chest with pride? Noise is a waste of energy, noise defeats its own object; silence gives the maker no trouble, silence is most effective to the end. When the rest is noise, those that are judged immediately upconjure the word conspiracy. And “organised opposition,” too! Think how easy to say, think how easy to believe, think how easy to think! The phrase is as facile as alliterative. Ah! my dear public, kindly accept the fore-going truths as from one having knowledge; and, when next you are in act (honestly, or otherwise) of rendering an opinion on a first performance, please remember that ‘behind the curtain’ nobody ever presupposes a conspiracy of silence.

Additionally, there is to be considered this: in the

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theatre, your disapproval when loud is not heard: the assaulted perceptions of your condemned ones become occupied only with your inability to judge. Did you but take the matter quietly, the author and the actors might take the matter correctly; and so might you.

Remember that unhappy winter night of 1894 when, at the St. James's Theatre, *Guy Domville* was born and murdered. Remember the behaviour of a particular band of Yahoos that upon this occasion thought it good to ululate and caterwaul at a certain pair of defenceless men: the one of whom, during the previous four years, had given to his patrons the absolute best* of the dramatic work of that period; the other of whom, during many a long day, had presented to the literature-reading world some of the most beautiful specimens of sheer writing with which it is acquainted. Did not their past records save these men from what was more than mere disapproval, from what was unmitigated insult? Oh, no! They were screeched and howled at as if they had been guilty of assaulting a little child. And what, after all, had Mr. George Alexander and Mr. Henry James been so fascinatorous as to do? . . . They had failed to please.

Robert Louis Stevenson pre-phrased this situation in its entirety. "The artist steps forth out of the crowd and proposes to delight: an impudent design, in which it is impossible to fail without odious circumstances."

And *how* had this particular pair of artists failed in their impudent design? Had they written and spoken disrespectfully of the ladies that were in the theatre? Had they denounced and cursed the Crown, or reviled and spat upon the Bible? Had they presented a work filled with anti-patriotism? Had they presented a play compounded of obscenity? None of those things. They had been

* *Sunlight and Shadow, The Idler, Lady Windermere's Fan, Liberty Hall, The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.*

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guilty of bringing a piece of delicate literature before the footlights. Consequently, the crowd, having caught the culprits red-handed, set to work and carefully stoned them in the market-place.

Now, this act of justice was the more noticeable because, only two hours previously, that same crowd had caused to come before the curtain a gentleman who had compiled a farce—a farce without one memorable line—a farce made acceptable chiefly with ‘business’ invented by the actors—a farce that was a piece of as flat burglary as ever was committed. Well, and what did those discriminative judges, those dispensers of praise and blame, do to *that* gentleman? Him they received as though he had been the saviour of his country.

Mr. Dash Dash, who, apparently, bought a copy of *Six Months Ago* and sold it again under the title of *Too Happy by Half*, was made the hero of the evening. Mr. George Alexander and Mr. Henry James, who, in their respective ways, succeeded in presenting a piece of fine acting and a piece of fine writing, were received as though they had been guilty of an accumulative crime of arson and rapine and murder.

The foregoing is not set forth to point an epigram or adorn a sneer; neither is it given as a little fairy story. It is an historical fact; and surely no great effort of imagination is required to picture the Yahoos—the Yahoos that helped to make this historical fact—as going out the next night and applauding sincerely, if boisterously, either a man howling a singultous song concerning his supposed powers of swilling beer, or a woman, well-stripped, thrusting her head backwards, backwards, till, for their admiring gaze, she ultimately protruded the same from between her tortured knees.

Mr. John Hollingshead, in his collection of entertaining and brilliant sketches called *Footlights*, has set down some

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shocking truths in regard of "A Discerning British Public." He has put his indietments into the mouth of a created character ; but, although the voice is the voice of Signor Lunatico, the hand is the hand of John Hollingshead. Note the first paragraph :—

"I dare say the public thinks itself a remarkably clever creature—always right, always rational, always amiable, always beyond criticism ; but I don't. I've seen a good deal of it, too, in my time ; and I ought to know. People flatter it, and toady it, and call it fine names, and pretend that its enlightenment is beyond question, and its judgment final ; while they believe the very opposite in their secret hearts, and give utterance to their real opinions in places where their voices have no influence."

Mr. Hollingshead's character is one of those rogues, vagabonds, outcasts called a play actor, who, having made a certain amount of money and acquired a certain amount of fame by using, in the legitimate drama, every kind of clap-trap trick with which he was acquainted, determines to gain, without so much trouble and hypocrisy, still more celebrity and fortune by devoting himself to—the tight-rope. In due season, his first appearance is announced. Blood-red placards, bestrewing the walls of the metropolis, proclaim that a certain Signor Lunatico has been engaged, at an enormous expense, to go through one of the most daring acts upon the aërial rope ever presented to a discerning British public.

"The day, the hour, the minute, arrived at last ; and never had such an audience assembled before at the Royal Greenacre Gardens. Every publicity had been given to the entertainment—the prospect of sudden death had been delicately hinted at—nothing, in fact, had been neglected by my intelligent manager, who had long felt the public pulse in such matters ; and the result was that 20,000 happy and amiable beings were accommodated within the grounds,

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while 50,000 more clung desperately to the walls of their paradise, and a larger number still were damned in the outer darkness of a remote distance. People were trampled under foot, like a field of corn; the weakest went to the wall, and never came back again; mothers squeezed into the crowd with children at the breast, and — lawk-a-daisy! who would have thought it! — the poor helpless innocents were smothered; housetops were worth a guinea a foot in pure virgin gold; and every chimney within a mile of the place was the home of some straining column-stander. The tall old elms that encircled the gardens were full to bowing down with eager human fruit; platforms of slender planks were hurriedly raised, which snapped like egg-chests under a brewer's dray, crippling many a determined sightseer in the splintered ruin; tall men were looked upon with dangerous spite by soiled and battered dwarfs, who felt inclined to bound upon the giants' shoulders, and wind themselves in their hair, like star-fish amongst the sea-weed. A row of scaffolding before some newly-raised carcasses of buildings at no great distance was stormed like a fortress, and at almost the same cost; while the empty unseasoned skeletons of dwellings seemed to rock under the weight of heavy men, who clung to them as to a sinking wreck; and in the outskirts of the crowd a boy was murdered by a savage gang of costermongers, because he refused to give up a telescope."

What was the hell-sent miracle that wrought this widespread madness?

"A human being had undertaken to ascend a cord stretched from its root in the earth to a small harbour of refuge near the top of a lofty tree, some 200 feet high; and, while in the centre of his perilous journey—at the half-way house of death—by throwing several clear somersaults in mid-air, he would linger and dally with a fearful suicide: which was just covered, but not concealed, by the thin

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disguise of a clever gymnastic entertainment. Truly the British public had much ground for priding itself upon its rapid advance in taste and humanity ! ”

There is a little delay. Then the manager goes to the room of the ex-actor, now Signor Lunatico, fearful that at the eleventh hour he has repented of his rashness.

“ ‘My dear sir,’ he said, ‘don’t let me hurry you at such a moment, but the people are beginning to get impatient.’ ”

“ ‘Couldn’t you murder a baby, a waiter, something of that kind,’ I replied, ‘to appease them ?’ ”

“ ‘Sir ?’ he returned excitedly, not seeming to comprehend me.

“ ‘Suppose,’ I said, ‘I feel heart-sick and unequal to the effort ?’ ”

“ ‘Mr. War—— I beg pardon ! Signor Lunatico !’ gasped the manager and proprietor of the Royal Greenacre Gardens. “I trust that I am dealing with a gentleman !’ ”

“ ‘Yes,’ I replied ; ‘but gentlemen are human, and this experiment requires nerves that are superhuman.’ ”

“ ‘Mr.—Signor !’ returned the manager, ‘this is no time for bandying words. There’s fifty thousand people in and about my gardens who will tear everybody and everything to pieces if they’re disappointed——’ ”

“ ‘Of their prey ?’ I filled in.

“ ‘Sir !’ returned the manager, becoming more and more excited, ‘I don’t understand you !’ ”

“ ‘Are they Christians ?’ I continued. ‘Are they white men ?’ ”

“ ‘Sir !’ repeated the gasping manager, ‘I don’t understand you—they’ve paid their money !’ ”

“ ‘Oh, I beg your pardon,’ I said. ‘Kindly announce that I shall be ready in a second.’ ”

“ ‘Thank you, signor,’ he said, much relieved, as he left the place ; and the next moment I heard the loud brass band playing the ‘Conquering Hero.’ ”

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Well, he does it. Step by step, he mounts and moves along the rope. As his howling enemies, the public, stand surging below and uttering what they intend for applause every time he moves his motley-covered limbs, he feels a contempt for his fellows that comes near to ecstasy. He duly effects his somersaults at a point from where the enlightened British audience look more contemptible still; and from his peaceful haven in the lofty tree-top they appear quite to sink into utter insignificance.

“The daring feat, after a few months’ performance, lost at once its novelty and its reputation for daring. As I demonstrated by experiment that a series of somersaults could be effected with the same mathematical certainty upon a rope 150 feet above the ground as upon the ground itself, my visitors fell off by degrees, and the advanced prices of admission were considerably diminished. From the moment that the shadow of death no longer hovered over the feat, an enlightened British audience could see nothing wonderful in it.”

The foregoing, though written in 1883, is still applicable. “Paid their money”! Exactly! But I have yet to learn why a first-night audience is able to give (if so it wishes) such an exhibition of inanity and vulgarity and brutality as would disgrace a cock-pit or a bear-garden—and yet is permitted to go unpunished; while, if a second-night audience (money or no money) did a similar thing, they, in all likelihood, would be washed out of the theatre straight into the street with firemen’s hose, and smitten (carefully but hard) on their silly heads with bâtons of rates-paid policemen. However, although the *Guy Domville* episode is in no wise the only one of its kind that I have witnessed, we may continue to hope that there *will* come a time when an enlightened and discerning British public shall realise that the most convincing and sufficing method of stating disapproval is by omitting to praise. And if I

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am told that an audience—which, if it be pleased, is expected to laugh and applaud—should, if it is not pleased, be permitted to howl and boo—well, I can only rejoin that there are quite a number of degrees in conducting the expression of one's emotions between, say, patting a man on the shoulder and spitting into his face.

Who fill the music-halls? The public. What public? People from both town and country: the second wanting to see life; the first wanting to avoid it. Does each win to the goal of his desire? The countryman thinks Yes; the townsman is not sure: both are seemingly content.

After all, the public is as easily pleased as it is hardly satisfied. It absorbs and enjoys, for example, *The Sorrows of Satan*, set forth by a too-industrious person whose name escapes me; whom, however, I remember as possessed of a supreme genius for making a short story long, and a long story longer. When a boy, I was once amazed at seeing a pint bottle filled to the very cork with a quantity of dry pyrogallie acid that I knew to be just one ounce. It was a triumph of bulk over weight. But I never realized the allegorical value of this phenomenon till I came upon a quarter-of-million words presenting an amount of matter that could easily, and should properly (allowing it worth doing at all) have been phrased by something less than fifty thousand. I have reason to believe that this wonder-working conjurer, whose name still escapes me (perhaps because it was not upon the title-page of the book to which I *now* refer) once set down Mr. Rudyard Kipling—that master of depth and concentration—as being shallow and expansive. This minute curiosity of criticism I have mentioned merely to remind myself (and all whom it may concern) that the public has not taken Mr. Kipling to its bosom; Mr. Kipling has taken the public to his. The author of *Barrack Room Ballads* is a very strong man—this being a truth which I

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have had the pleasure of assisting another writer to record elsewhere ; * and the author of *Barrack Room Ballads* has gripped the public by the heart ; and he has made the public all his very own ; and he has handled it and dandled it and thrilled it to the soul. When a father takes up a baby and carefully throws it to the ceiling and carefully catches that baby and makes it coo and chuckle with delight, no unprejudiced observer alleges that the strength, and power, and cunning, and merit is being exhibited by the baby. To sum up from the foregoing contrast of a pair of popular favourites—one may easily see that, unless a man is possessed either of a private income or of a supreme talent and never-failing fecundity combined with an indomitable will and an unfaltering persistence, it is better for him that, rather than offer to the public things difficult, small, subtle, strong, deep, wise, he sell to it things facile, bulky, obvious, weak, shallow, foolish. If, after all this, you should ask me what I am ‘driving at,’ I would answer that I do not so much deplore the success of the one, as that I lament the mere corresponding success of the other. And I would ask *you* Why, in the name of all that’s proportionate, when eighty thousand copies of *The Sorrows of Satan* can be disposed of, why should not *Barrack Room Ballads* sell to the extent of twenty millions ?

Hitherto have I written chiefly of things as they are ; now will I write only of things as they could be. Come ! Let us dream.

Lo, we are in a place of perfection ! The music-hall has departed ; in its stead is a hall-of-music. The palace of varieties is now but a building where can be found differences only of kind and not of degree. And things

* “ *Rudyard Kipling : An Attempt at Appreciation.* ” By G. F. Monkshood.

THE MUSIC HALLS.

are so ordained that evening shall be young and night-time blue. And, although *Raucous* indeed is gone with his red Nose, and *Sot's* singultous Songs, where no one knows —“still a Ruby kindles in the Vine and many a Garden by the Water blows.”

Here (in our dream, be it remembered) is no massing of the gross masquerading as the gay, no death-like dulness put forth as all that there is of most brilliant. Here is no riot of fact, but only a revel of fancy. Here is no rule of the plumes, but only a reign of the roses. And the roses are beautiful, fragrant, inerminous; and the plumes, though forced to abdicate in favour of the flowers, are no longer mere black feathers fit only for funerals, but are re-dyed to whiteness and wedding-value.

Gone is the hideous and the hateful; gone is the unhappy and the unnecessary. Gone is the lady contortionist with that anxious grin flickering upon her troubled face; gone is the perverted girl with those far-flung legs stretched flat and wide apart. Gone are the horisonous discords; and in their stead are melodies sweet and harmonious. Gone are the honeyless words of stupidity; and in their stead are sayings sweet and wise. Gone are the rags maculated and pediculous; and in their stead are garments comie but clean, garments occasionally unkempt but invariably undisturbing. And the costumes of the women, though rich and gay and shining, are coloured correctly.

As for the authors—though they are not precisely duplicates of Burns and Béranger, yet have they in themselves something of W. S. Gilbert and W. E. Henley; though they are not exactly makers of national ballads and immortal songs, yet (as with the two last-named) are they always witty and inspiring, always masters of rhyme and reason, always producers of the original and the well-expressed. For example, no longer do they write concern-

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ing wine and woman as if they knew nothing about either ; no longer do they permit themselves to believe that age cannot wither nor custom stale the infinite vulgarities of the cab-rank and the race-course. And so we may desist from exhorting them to be less bad : for they now, though not always quite equal, are always quite good. They are intelligent and satisfying : because they are rightly encouraged. They are reliable and pleasing : because they are rightly paid. They are not only prolific ; they are fruitful : because they are presented (as was Ung, long ages ago) with “ the little gift in the doorway and the praise no gift can buy.” And they are not only popular and duly appreciated ; they are competent and finely meritorious : because the public has grown discriminative, and become intolerant of the bad, and desirous only of the good.

Especially has the music improved. It is now in the hands of trained men : who are as properly rewarded as should be all artists that are worthy of their pay. These men show that a piece of work can be technical without being tiresome, can be the more craft-like without being the less enchanting ; and they contrive, in the manner of Alfred Cellier and Sir Arthur Sullivan, that a melody shall be cultured, sweet, riant, graceful, and yet have the mercantile qualities of being easy and memorable. The tunes of the music-hall (in our dream, be it still remembered) possess all the merits of those of the concert-room, with an added fire of spontaneity and an accessional charm of resource. Modelled more upon the French and less upon the German, or quaint and dear and flowing as is ever the best of the English, these tunes are very popular—as popular as was *Ta-rara-boom-de-ay*, or any other dreadful-sounding abomination of the past.

And lo !—in our dream-built hall-of-music—we now hear Voices and see Visions.

‘ I am the Spirit of Song : I appease ; I do not appal.’

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‘I am the Spirit of Dance: I enchant; I do not repel.’

‘I am Gaiety: I enliven; I do not depress.’

‘I am Pleasure: I renovate; I do not destroy.’

‘I am Entertainment: no longer can you say with truth that it is better to work than to be amused.’

Anon the melody changes, and we hear a song of the open road. Again the melody changes, and we hear a song of the open sea. And the steady sturdy tramp-tramp of armed men gives place to the mighty on-coming swash-swash of ironclad ships. And, loud and high, the voices are heard of such writers as Algernon Charles Swinburne, with his *Word for the Navy*, and William Ernest Henley, with his *England, My England*. And, higher still, and higher (as a ‘runner’ might tip with fire if a vast illumination surprised a festal night, outlining round and round Paul’s dome from pillar to spire) comes—not, as this paraphrase will perhaps imply, the accents of Robert Browning and his ‘cello strains of Love—but the notes of Rudyard Kipling and his trumpet blasts of Imperialism. Little matters it, now, that the music-hall is more of a schoolroom than a playground for the British Brain: there is something *good* to learn; and not the pothouse pleasantries of such doggrel as “We don’t want to fight, but, by Jingo, if we do, we’ve got the ships, we’ve got the men, we’ve got the money too!” Instead, are to be heard the rhymes and reasons of that consummate literary artist who is the acclaimed and accredited mouthpiece of the nation that, though *imperfect*, is the *best* that has ever had being on the face of the known globe—the man who gave that splendid shout, *The English Flag*—the man who sounded that note of warning, *Recessional*—the articulate man who sang *A Song of the English*.

And in the palace of which we are dreaming may be distinguished many other voices—equally great, equally potent; but all different. Man does not live by patriotism alone.

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In their own time, Shakspeare and his fellow craftsmen dominated the thought of all England, uplifted the hearts of the people to issues braver and finer. Whence was the message delivered? From the playhouse! . . . In our time, the play is mentally naught beside the novel and the newspaper. Attack a subject in print, leave it for dead — long after, it shall be found on the stage, not only alive but pretending to have been born there . . . In the future, we may find ideas truly starting into life from the theatre itself. What if others should germinate in the very music-hall?

The future! Ah, that is a convenient place — for dreams!

GEORGE GAMBLE.

Dan Leno.

“Standing on the Steps of the
Refreshment Room.”



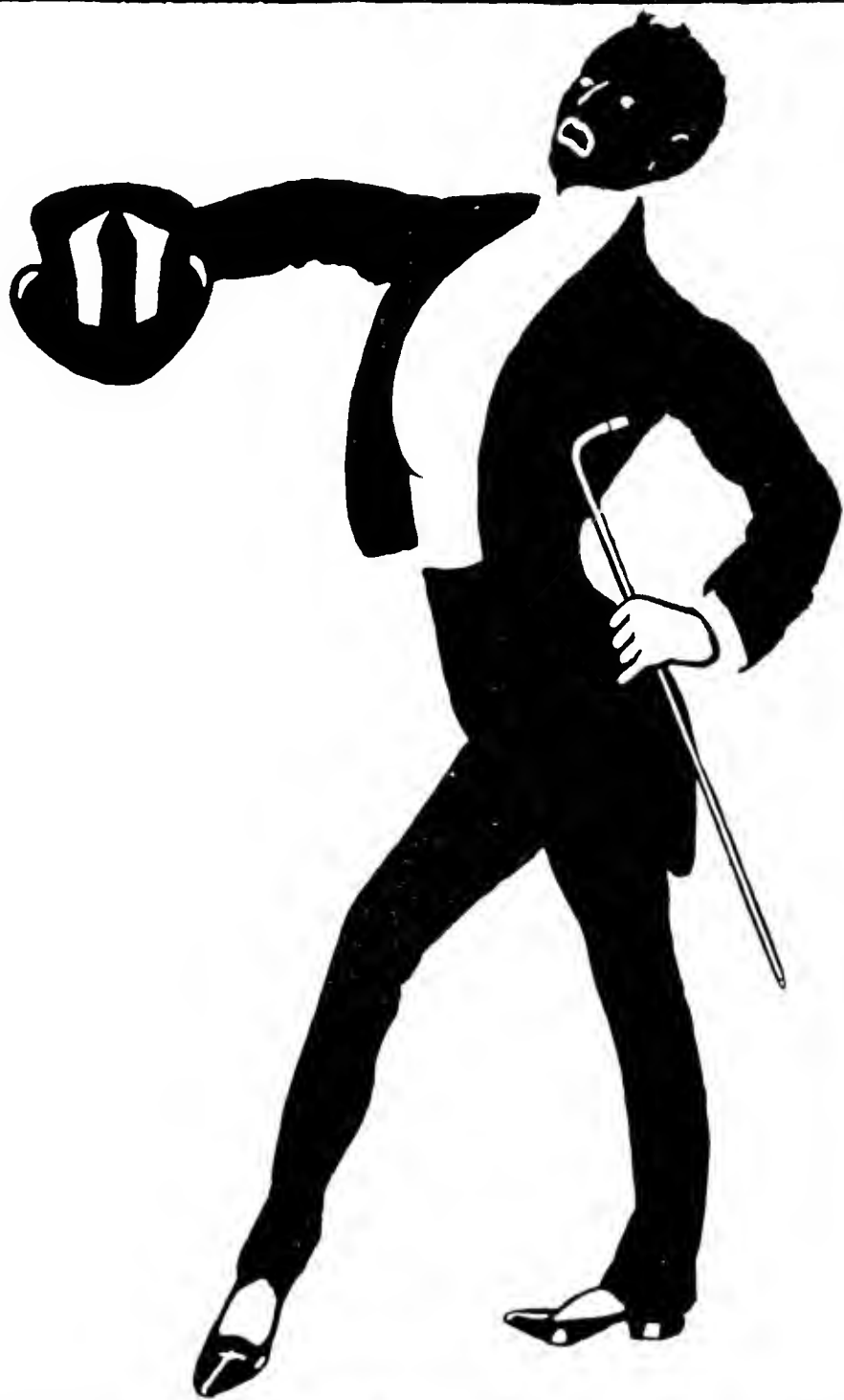
George Robey.

“First Prize at the Beauty Show.”



Eugene Stratton.

“The Cake Walk.”



Vesta Victoria.

“No, thanks, Not for Me!”



Chirgwin.

“The White Eyed Caffir.”



R. G. Knowles.

“Adam and Eve.”



Harry Randall.

“Tateho! What ho!”



Bessie Wentworth.

“Coons!”



Marguerite Cornille.

“The Simple Maid.”

Marque
Cornille



Herbert Campbell.

“Running to Waist.”



Marie Lloyd.

“Everything in the Garden’s
Lovely.”



Gus Elen.

“The Golden Dustman.”



Albert Chevalier.

“Talk of a Time! we did 'ave a
Time! we did 'ave a Roaring Time.”



Harry Bedford.

“A Little Bit off the Top.”



Alec Hurley.

“The Best Little Woman in the
Wide, Wide World.”



The Bros. Griffiths.



T. E. Dunville.

“The Scientific Man.”



Marie Loftus.

“She Lisped when She said
‘Yes.’”



Vesta Tilley.

“Down the Strand, That’s the
Land of the Midnight Son.”



G. H. Maedermott.

“We don’t want to fight.”



Paul Martinetti.
In "Robert Macaire."



Ada Reeve.

“It’s All gone down in my
Diary.”



Harriet Vernon.

“In Days of Old.”



Lockhart's Elephants.

“Boney!”



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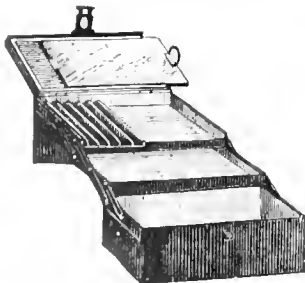
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